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AN UNINVITED GUEST.

It was nearly three o'clock on a hot summer's day; the long polished counters of our bank, the Royal Domestic Bank, were crowded with customers—money was flowing in and running out in the usual business-like manner. From a raised desk in my private room, I, the manager of the Royal Domestic Bank, looked out on the busy scene with a certain pride and pleasure. The Royal Domestic is not a long-established institution, and, without vanity, I may say that much of its prosperity and success is attributable to the zeal and experience of its manager. In corroboration of this statement, I might refer to the last printed Report of the directors—laid before the shareholders at their annual meeting—in which they are pleased to say— But after all, perhaps I may be thought guilty of undue egotism and conceit, if I repeat the flattering terms in which they speak of me.

A clerk puts his head inside my door. 'Mr Thrapstow, sir, to speak to you.'

'Send him in, Roberts,' I said.

Charles Thrapstow I had known from boyhood; we had both been reared in the same country town. The fact that his parents were of considerably higher social status than mine, perhaps made our subsequent intimacy all the pleasanter to me, and caused me to set a value upon his good opinion greater than its intrinsic worth. Thrapstow was a stockbroker, a very clever, pushing fellow, who had the reputation of possessing an excellent judgment and great good luck. At my request, he had brought his account to our bank. It was a good account; he always kept a fair balance, and the cashier had never to look twice at his cheques.

Charlie, like everybody else in business, occasionally wanted money. I had let him have advances at various times, of course amply covered by securities, advances which were always promptly repaid, and the securities redeemed. At this time, he had five thousand pounds of ours, to secure which we held City of Damascus Water-company's bonds to the nominal value of ten thousand. My

directors rather demurred to these bonds, as being somewhat speculative in nature; but as I represented that the Company was highly respectable, and its shares well quoted in the market, and that I had full confidence in our customer, our people sanctioned the advance. I had perhaps a little uneasy feeling myself about those bonds, for they were not everybody's money, and there might have been some little difficulty in finding a customer for them in case of the necessity for a sudden sale.

Thrapstow came in radiant. He was a good-looking fellow, with a fair beard and moustache, bright eyes of bluish gray, a nose tilted upwards giving him a saucy, resolute air; he was always well dressed, the shiniest of boots, the most delicate shade of colour in his light trousers and gloves, the glossiest of blue frock-coats, a neat light dust-coat over it, a blue bird's-eye scarf round his throat, in which was thrust a massive pin, containing a fine topaz, full of lustre, and yellow as beaten gold.

'Well, I've got a customer for those Damascus bonds waiting at my office; sold 'em well, too—to Billing Brothers, who want them for an Arab firm. One premium, and I bought at one discount.'

'I'm very glad of it, Charlie,' I said, and I felt really pleased, not only for Thrapstow's sake, but because I should be glad to get rid of the bonds, and the directors' shrugs whenever they were mentioned.

'Hand 'em over, old fellow,' said Charlie, 'and I'll bring you Billing's cheque up in five minutes. You won't have closed by then; or if you have, I'll come in at the private door.'

I went to the safe, and put my hand upon the bonds.

Charlie stood there looking so frank and free, holding out his hand for the bonds, that I hadn't the heart to say to him, as I ought to have done: Bring your customer here, and let him settle for the bonds, and then I will hand them over. I should have said this to anybody else, but somehow I couldn't say it to Charlie. There would only be

five minutes' risk, and surely it was no risk at all.

The thing was done in a moment; I was carried away by Thrapstow's irresistible manner. I handed over the bonds, and Charlie went off like a shot.

It wanted seven minutes to three, and I sat watching the hands of the clock in a little tremor, despite my full confidence in Thrapstow; but then I had so thorough a knowledge of all the rules of banking, that I couldn't help feeling that I had done wrong. A few minutes, however, would set it right. Charlie's white hat and glittering topaz would soon put in an appearance.

Just at a minute to three the cashier brought me three cheques, with a little slip of paper attached. They were Thrapstow's cheques, for fifteen hundred—twelve hundred and three hundred odd respectively, and his balance was only five hundred odd.

I turned white and cold. 'Of course you must refuse them,' I said to the cashier.

When he went out, I sat in my chair quite still for a few moments, bewildered at the sudden misfortune that had happened to me. Charles Thrapstow was clearly a defaulter; but there was this one chance—he might have given the cheques in the confidence of selling those bonds, and placing the balance to his account. In due course, these cheques, which were crossed, would have been brought to the clearing-house, and have been presented on the morrow. But it seemed that his creditors had some mistrust of him, and had caused the cheques to be demanded out of due course.

The clock struck three. Charles had not come back. The bank doors closed with a clang. I could endure the suspense no longer. Telling the bank porter that if Mr Thrapstow came, he was to be admitted at the private door, and was to be detained in my room till I returned, I went out, and made my way to his office, which was only a few hundred yards distant. He wasn't there. The clerk, a youth of fifteen, knew nothing about him. He was in Chapel Court, perhaps—anywhere, he didn't know. Had he been in within the last half-hour? Well, no; the clerk did not think he had. His story, then, of the customer waiting at his office was a lie.

With a heavy heart, I went back to the bank. No; Mr Thrapstow hadn't been in, the porter said. I took a Hansom, and went off to the office of Mr Gedgemount, the solicitor to the bank. I told him in confidence what had happened, and asked his advice. 'Could I get a warrant against this Thrapstow for stealing the bonds?'

'Upon my word,' said Gedgemount, 'I don't think you can make a criminal matter of it. It isn't larceny, because you abandoned the possession of the bonds voluntarily. No; I don't see how you can touch him. You must make a bankrupt of him, and then you can pursue him, as having fraudulently carried off his assets.'

But that advice was no good to me. I think I was wrong in taking it. I think I ought to have gone straight off to the police office, and put the affair in the hands of the detectives. Dignified men of law, like Gedgemount, always find a dozen reasons for inaction, except in matters that bring grist to their own mill.

I went home completely disheartened and

dejected. How could I face my directors with such a story as that I had to tell? The only excuse that I could urge of private friendship and confidence in the man who had robbed us, would make the matter only the worse. Clearly, at the same time that I told the circumstances to the directors, I should be bound to place my resignation in their hands, to be put into force if they thought fit. And there would be little doubt but that they would accept it. How damaging, too, the story would be to me, when I tried to obtain another appointment!

I had promised to take my wife and children for an excursion down the river, as soon as the bank closed, and the youngsters eagerly reminded me of my promise. I replied so savagely and sternly, that the children made off in tears; my wife, coming to see what was the matter, fared little better. I must have had a sunstroke or something, she told me, and brought bandages and eau de Cologne. I flung away in a rage, and went out of the house. I must be doing something, I felt, and I hailed a cab and drove to Thrapstow's lodgings.

Mr Thrapstow wasn't coming home that night, his landlady told me; she thought he was away for a little jaunt; but she didn't know. He occupied the ground-floor of a small house in Ecclesford Street, Pimlico—two rooms opening into each other. I told the woman that I would sit down and write a letter. She knew me well enough, as I had frequently visited Thrapstow, and she left me to myself. Then I began to overhaul everything, to try to find out some clue to his whereabouts. A few letters were on the chimney-piece: they were only circulars from tradesmen. In the fireplace was a considerable quantity of charred tinder. He had evidently been burning papers recently, and a quantity of them. I turned the tinder carefully over, spreading it out upon a newspaper. I found nothing legible except one little scrap of paper, which the fire had not altogether reduced to powder, on which I saw the name Isabel shining with metallic lustre. Then I went to the bedroom, and searched that. Here, too, were evident preparations for flight: coats and other garments thrown hastily into cupboards, boxes turned out, an odd glove or two lying upon the dressing-table. I carefully searched all the pockets for letters or other documents, but I found nothing. The keys were left in all the receptacles; an instance of Charlie's thoughtfulness for others, in the midst of his rascality.

Lying upon the wash-stand was a card, which was blank upon one side, but on the other had the name of a photographer printed upon it. The card was wet, as if it had been soaked in water; and near the upper end of it was a round irregular cut, which did not quite penetrate the card. It had evidently once had a photograph fastened on it; accordingly, the card had been wetted, to facilitate the removal of the photograph, whilst the face of the portrait had evidently been cut out, in order to place it in a locket or something similar.

It struck me at once that the photograph, about which a man on the eve of flight would take so much trouble, must be of a person very dear to him; probably his sweetheart. Although I had been intimate with Thrapstow, he had always been very reserved as to his own friends and associates, and I had no clue to guide me to any of them except the photographer's card.

Re-entering my cab, I drove off to the photographer's. There was no number or distinguishing mark upon the card, and the chances seemed faint that he would be able to tell me anything about it. Indeed, at first, when the man found that I wasn't a customer, he seemed little inclined to trouble himself about the matter. The promise of a fee, however, made him more reasonable, and he offered to let me see his books, that I might search for the name I wanted to find. But then I didn't know the name I wanted to find. It was unlikely that the photograph had been done for Thrappstow; if it had, there would probably appear in the books only the useless record of his address, already known to me. Then the man shook his head. If I didn't know the name, it was no use looking: the card was nothing, he said; he sent hundreds out every month. What information could he possibly give me? Then I tried to describe the personal appearance of Thrappstow. But again he shook his head. If he hadn't taken his likeness, he wouldn't be likely to remember him; hardly even then, so many people passed through his hands.

All this time he had been carelessly holding the card in his fingers, glancing at it now and then, and suddenly an idea seemed to strike him. 'Stop a bit,' he said, and went into his dark chamber, and presently emerged, smelling strongly of chemicals. 'Look here,' he said triumphantly. I looked, and saw a very faint ghostly impression of a photograph. 'It's printed itself through,' said the man—'they will sometimes—and I've brought it to light. Yes, I know the original of that.' Again he dived into a closet, and brought out a negative with a number and label to it. Then he turned to his book, and wrote down an address for me—Mrs Maidmont, Larkspur Road, Notting Hill.

Away I went to Larkspur Road. Mrs Maidmont's house was a small comfortable residence, with bright windows, verandahs, gorgeous window-boxes, and striped sun-blinds. Mrs Maidmont was at home, said a very neat, pretty-looking maid; and I sent in my card, with a message: 'On most important business.' The maid came back to say that her mistress did not recognise the name, but would I walk in? I was shewn into a pretty drawing-room on the first floor. An elderly lady rose to greet me with old-fashioned courtesy, at the same time with a good deal of uneasy curiosity visible in her face. This was not the original of the photograph, who was a young and charming girl.

'Madam,' I said rapidly, 'I believe that my friend, Charles Thrappstow, is well known to you; now, it is of the utmost importance that I should ascertain where he is at this moment.'

'Stay!' said the old lady. 'You are labouring under a complete mistake; I know nothing whatever of the gentleman whose name you mention; a name I never heard before.'

Was she deceiving me? I did not think so.

'Perhaps Miss Maidmont may know,' I said eagerly.

'Miss Maidmont is not likely to have formed any acquaintance without her mother's knowledge,' said Mrs Maidmont with dignity. There seemed to be no alternative but for me to retreat with apologies.

'I am very busy, you see,' went on the old lady, with a wave of the hand; and indeed the room, now I looked about me, I saw to be strewn with

preparations for some festive event, a ball perhaps, or, from a wreath of orange blossoms that I saw peeping out of a milliner's box, more likely a wedding. I was about to take my departure reluctantly, when a young girl, a charming young girl, bounded into the room: she was the original of the photograph.

'O mamma!' she cried, 'here's a letter from poor Charlie to say he can't possibly come here to-night! Isn't it provoking? And I want to consult him about so many things.'

'Well, my dear Isabel,' said the old lady placidly, 'you'll have enough of his company after to-morrow.' From which I judged that my surmise as to the wedding was correct, and that Charlie was the bridegroom-elect.

'By the way,' she went on, 'here's a gentleman, Isabel, who insists that we know a Mr Charles—I forget the name now.'

'Thrappstow,' I interjected.

'A Mr Charles Thrappstow. You know of no such person, Bella?'

'I know of no Mr Charles, but Charles Tempest,' said Isabel.

'It is singular, too, that the initials of our friends should be the same. May I ask if you have given your portrait, taken by Blubore of Kensington?'

'Upon my word,' said Mrs Maidmont, rising, and sounding the bell, 'this is rather too much from a total stranger. We don't know your friend, and we don't know you.—Susan, shew this gentleman out.'

'But a gentleman,' I cried, 'with blue eyes, and yellow beard and moustache, and turned-up nose.'

'No more!' cried Mrs Maidmont. 'Am I to repeat once more, we know nothing about him?'

What could I do under these circumstances but take my leave? In Susan, however, I found an unexpected ally. She had heard my parting words of description, and she turned to me as we were descending the stairs, and said: 'Miss Isabel's young man is exactly like that.' Half-a-crown and a few blandishments, which, under the circumstances, I think even my worthy spouse would have condoned, put me into possession of the facts.

Miss Maidmont was really going to be married to-morrow morning at St Spikenard's Church to a Mr Charles Tempest, a very good-looking young man, whom they had not known long, but who seemed to be very well off. My description of my friend tallied exactly with Susan's of the bridegroom; but the coincidence might be merely accidental.

'Had Miss Maidmont a photograph of her lover?' I asked.

She had, in her own room, it seemed. Susan couldn't get at it now without suspicion; but she promised to secure it, and bring it with her, if I would meet her at nine o'clock at the corner of the street.

I was punctual to my tryst; and at nine, Susan made her appearance with a morocco-case containing an excellent likeness of my friend, Charles Thrappstow, massive pin with topaz in it, and all.

Now, what was to be done? Should I go to Mrs Maidmont, and tell her how she was deceived in her daughter's lover? That would have been the way best adapted to spare the feelings of the Maidmonts; but would it bring back the five thousand pounds? I thought not.

'Miss Maidmont,' I soliloquised, 'will find some way to warn her lover. Even robbing a bank may

not embitter a girl against her sweetheart, and no doubt she's over head and ears in love with Charlie.' No; I determined on a different plan.

I rose early next morning, dressed myself with care, put on a pair of pale primrose gloves, donned my newest beaver, and took a cab to St Spikenard's, Notting Hill.

The bells were jangling merrily as I alighted at the church-door; a small crowd had already gathered on the pavement, drawn together by that keen foresight of coming excitement characteristic of the human species. 'Friend of the bridegroom,' I whispered to the verger, and I was forthwith shewn into the vestry. The clergyman was there already, and shook hands with me in a vague kind of way.

'Not the bridegroom?' he said in a mild interrogative manner. I told him that I was only one of his friends, and we stood looking at each other in a comatose kind of way, till a little confusion at the vestry-door broke the spell. 'Here he comes!' whispered some one; and next moment there appeared in the vestry, looking pale and agitated, but very handsome, Mr Charles Thrapstow.

I had caught him by the arm and led him into a corner, before he recognised who I was. When he saw me, I thought he would have fainted. 'Don't betray me,' he whispered.

I held out my hand with significant gesture.

'Five thousand,' I whispered in his ear.

'You shall have it in five minutes.'

'Your minutes are long ones, Master Charles,' I said.

With trembling fingers, he took out a pocket-book, and handed me a roll of notes.

'I meant it for you, Tom,' he said. Perhaps he did, but we know the fate of good intentions.

It didn't take me long to count over those notes: there were exactly five thousand pounds.

'Now,' said I, 'Master Charlie, take yourself off!'

'You promised,' he urged, 'not to betray me.'

'No more I will, if you go.'

'She's got ten thousand of her own,' he whispered.

'Be off; or else!'

'No; I won't,' said Charlie, making up his mind with a desperate effort; 'I'll not. I'll make a clean breast of it.'

At that moment there was a bit of a stir, and a general call for the bridegroom. The bride had just arrived, people said. He pushed his way out to the carriage, and whispered a few words to Isabel, who fell back in a faint. There was a great fuss and bustle, and then some one came and said that there was an informality in the license, and that the wedding couldn't come off that day.

I didn't wait to see anything further, but posted off to the bank, and got there just as the board were assembling. I suppose some of the directors had got wind of Thrapstow's failure, for the first thing I heard when I got into the board-room was old Venables grumbling out: 'How about those Damascus bonds, Mr Manager?' I rode rough-shod over old Venables, and tyrannised considerably over the board in general that day, but I couldn't help thinking how close a thing it was, and how very near shipwreck I had been.

As for Thrapstow, I presently heard that, after all, he had arranged with his creditors, and made it up with Miss Maidmont. He had a tongue that would wind round anything, if you only gave him

time, and I wasn't much surprised at hearing that his wedding-day was fixed. He hasn't sent me an invitation, and I don't suppose he will, and I certainly shall not thrust myself forward a second time as an uninvited guest.

THE SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

THE establishment of Schools of Design, with a view to improvement in artistic taste and drawing, is a new thing in England, for it dates only from 1837, and was not matured until a year after the Exhibition of 1851, when the South Kensington Museum was set on foot. At this time, 1852, a great impetus was given to the School of Design, by the appointment of Mr Cole as its working chief. Through his energy, the progress in the department has been most rapid. In the twenty-one years which have elapsed since that period, as we gather from a speech he made about six months ago to the Nottingham School of Art, he has witnessed the conversion of twenty languishing schools of design into a hundred and twenty-eight flourishing schools of art, for teaching artisans to draw. Five hundred night-classes have been established, and, at the present moment, 180,000 boys and girls are being instructed in elementary drawing, and 1250 schools and classes for science instruction. The museum has been visited by twelve millions of persons, and has circulated objects of art to a hundred and ninety-five localities holding exhibitions, to which more than four millions of local visitors had contributed L.93,000. Some may ask: What is the cost of this to the nation? and taking the figures from authoritative sources, we reply that, including what has been spent on South Kensington, the British Museum, National Gallery, and National Portrait Gallery, there is a total outlay, for the sake of Art of one kind or other, amounting to close on six millions.

Such is the sum that the country has expended in trying to improve the native taste for art, with a view to elevating the character of the national productions. The effort has been a very noble one. Within reasonable bounds, no pains have been spared to spread a better knowledge of what is pure, elegant, and tasteful in design. As regards recent purchases of entire collections of articles, we may mention the Blacas gems and antiquities, bought in 1866 for L.48,000; the Casellani collection of ancient jewellery, secured for L.24,000; and the Peel collection of pictures, for L.70,000. The first two are in the British Museum, the last in the National Gallery. No collections of such magnitude have been added to the South Kensington Museum, though some of the objects have been very costly. On the whole, however, the expenditure has been most judiciously conducted; and so enormous has been the increase in the value of works of art since the establishment of the museum, that if the whole collection were dispersed by auction now, the amount realised would be far in excess of the cost of the objects.

The South Kensington authorities have devoted considerable attention to female art-education with a view to remunerative employment. There are many branches of art-industry—for example, painting on porcelain, illuminating, and decorating fans—especially adapted for intelligent young women. With such a training as the art-school at South Kensington affords, many young ladies who are

now, for miserable salaries, employed as governesses, ought to be able to support themselves. We believe that every year there is more demand for the articles which come under the classes we have named. But it is, of course, for students of the other sex that the art-education at South Kensington is chiefly intended.

The present high position of the South Kensington Museum—and there is nothing like it in Europe—is very much owing to the energy and indefatigable perseverance of Mr Cole. Under his direction, the 'loan' system pursued at South Kensington became a distinctive feature of that institution. By means of this method, a vast number of objects of art, which for purposes of comparison and study would have been lost in private collections, have been exhibited to the public. In 1862, advantage was taken of the increased number of visitors, in consequence of the International Exhibition, to collect together from all parts of England an unrivalled assemblage of works of art of the medieval and other periods. Private collectors came forward with praiseworthy alacrity; and a vast number of valuable specimens of sculpture, ivory carvings, bronzes, decorative furniture, metal-work, jewellery, cameos and gems, nielli, clocks and watches, arms and armour, mosaics, pottery, glass, enamels, musical instruments, textile fabrics, book-bindings, and miniatures, were collected together. Since that period, some important loan collections have been on view, and we think it may not be uninteresting to note the chief of these in chronological order, together with one or two important bequests. Passing over 1863 and 1864, we come to the Exhibition of Portrait Miniatures in 1865, when the gems of that exquisite style of art were assembled. In that year, also, the cartoons were removed for exhibition from Hampton Court. In the same year, the Earl of Derby suggested the formation of a loan collection of historical portraits. The results were the exhibitions held in the years 1866, 1867, and 1868, in the building which had been used as the refreshment-room of the International Exhibition of 1862, comprising nearly three thousand pictures. These were chronologically arranged, the first exhibition including works from the earliest periods to 1688; the second, 1688—1800; and the third, 1800—1867.

The year 1867 was distinguished in the museum proper by a display of works and drawings by Flaxman, including some fine specimens of Wedgwood-ware designed by him. One of the most interesting articles was a book of sketches made by him, and presented to Mrs Flaxman on the fifteenth anniversary of their marriage. In 1868, the purchases made at the Paris Exposition of the previous year made quite an exhibition by themselves. Two bequests were also then shewn to the public—the Hope collection of pictures, rich in examples of artists of the Low Countries; and the Plumley collection of enamelled miniatures, by Essex, Bone, and others.

The following year, the magnificent series of specimens of arms and armour collected by Sir S. Rush Meyrick, at Goodrich Court, on the Wye, was exhibited. Though somewhat deficient in early armour and English examples, it is one of the finest collections in existence; and if it could have been purchased by the government, and added to the Tower armoury, we should have possessed one of the finest collections in the world. In the same

year, eighty-three designs of fans, sent in by students of twenty-seven schools of art, caused great attention to be directed to this art, which, as we have before remarked, is so admirably suited for female execution, and induced the department to form in the next year (1870) a loan exhibition of fans. So successful was the invitation to possessors of rare, curious, and beautiful examples of that article, that 413 specimens, lent by eighty-four persons, were soon assembled. Some of these were of great historical interest, apart from their rich decoration. So expensive are some fans, that M. Duvellero of Paris, in the palmy days of the Second Empire, has executed examples to the value of one thousand pounds each.

In 1871, the Roman and Anglo-Saxon antiquities (chiefly of the latter period) discovered at Faversham in Kent, and bequeathed by Mr W. Gibbs of that place, were exhibited. The services of the celebrated antiquary, Mr Roach Smith, were secured to prepare a catalogue, and we need hardly say an interesting description of these important antiquities was the result. During the formation of the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway, Mr Gibbs was on the look-out for objects of antiquity. He was fortunately able to secure a great number of examples of jewellery, ancient glass, beads, weapons, and pottery. Mr Smith says: 'Many of our habits, customs, and superstitions, together with not a few of our arts, are only to be properly understood by a knowledge of Anglo-Saxon life, obtained through history and archaeology. But as the early Saxons were a people without annals, their immigration into Britain, the events which enabled them to obtain possession of the country, and those which followed their permanent settlement for a considerable period of time, are unrecorded; or, at the best, narrated by historians who lived subsequently, and who seem to have compiled from chronicles which have perished, and from tradition. Under such circumstances, the evidence produced from the graves of the adventurers from Germany and their descendants, wholly unlooked for until a comparatively recent period, is especially valuable.' The collection is especially rich in circular jewelled fibulae. In the same year the museum acquired by purchase the unrivalled collection of rings formed by Mr Waterston.

Three special loan exhibitions distinguished 1872. The first of these was the Duke of Edinburgh's collection, formed during a five years' cruise of the *Galatea*, from 1867 to 1871. Previous to its arrangement at Clarence House, the duke offered it to the South Kensington authorities, and of course his proposal was accepted. The exhibition was opened to the public in February, and so popular was it, that on the three free days of the second week, 31,554 persons visited the museum. A notable feature of the exhibition consisted of a loan collection of musical instruments, some of them very old and curious.

Soon after this interesting collection had been opened to the public, one of examples of ancient and modern jewellery was arranged in the water-colour gallery. Family jewel-cases and private collections were laid under contribution, and the result was an assemblage of immense value—in a pecuniary point of view even—but still more for the artistic merits and historical interest of many of the specimens. The catalogues are always good

at South Kensington, and that of this exhibition, prefaced by an interesting history of the art, by Mr Soden Smith, was no exception to the rule. The art-student could follow the art from the exquisite productions of the Greek and Etruscan periods, and the more massive styles of Rome, through the Cellini revival of the sixteenth century, to the decadence of more modern times. The lover of historical associations had an opportunity of seeing the Darnley jewel, made about 1576 for Lady Mary Douglas, in memory of her husband, the Regent of Scotland; a pendent reliquary of the Cellini period, which belonged to Catharine of Braganza; a pendent jewel given by Queen Catharine Parr to Sir George Penruddock in 1544; a sapphire which, at the time of Queen Elizabeth's death, was thrown out of the window by Lady Scrope, as a token for her brother to take to James VI. in Scotland; an *enseigne* presented to Sir Francis Drake in 1579 by Queen Elizabeth; and a richly enamelled missal cover which belonged to Henrietta Maria, queen of Charles I. The magnificent series of cameos, intaglios, &c. collected by the third Duke of Devonshire, and known as the 'Devonshire gems,' were also exhibited.

This year, a special loan exhibition of decorative art needlework made before 1800, was opened on the last day of May. Six hundred and ninety-six examples of all periods and varieties of stitchery were collected, some of them of great beauty and historical interest. German wool-work, has, we trust, only temporarily caused the practice of real embroidery to fall into desuetude, but we feel sure that an examination of this collection would shew that the examples of old English and foreign needlework are worthy of imitation. The display of ecclesiastical vestments—chasubles, copes, stoles, maniples, and the rest that are here collected, might put an anti-ritualist fresh from Exeter Hall in danger of going out of his mind at the sight. Works of all kinds having historical interest are grouped in a class by themselves, and relics of Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth, and Charles I. meet us at every turn. Those who have never made embroidery a study, will be astonished at the beauty and art-value of many examples here shewn. The portions of vestments on which embroidery is most lavished are the orphreys (from the old word *orfrais*, derived from the free use of gold), or borders, of chasubles and copes, and the hoods of the latter, these parts being decorated with figures of saints under tabernacle-work. The Fish-mongers' Company lend their magnificent pall—perhaps the finest in England—which was used at the funeral of Sir William Walworth in the time of Richard II. The Queen contributes the baby-linen basket worked by Mary Queen of Scots, and believed to have been that of James VI. of Scotland. The 'exhibit' of the Countess Brownlow—namely, eighteen pieces of baby-linen made by Queen Elizabeth for Mary I. may be next fittingly mentioned. Of the Charles I. relics, the most interesting is perhaps the embroidered star from the mantle of the Order of the Garter, worn by the unfortunate monarch on the scaffold, and given by him to Captain Basil Woodd.

We have thus endeavoured to trace the rise and progress of the South Kensington Museum, and the means by which it has attained to its present popularity, but we must not forget to mention the Art Library, which is quite an institution there.

This contains more than thirty thousand books and pamphlets on art-subjects, besides photographs and engravings. By the expenditure of one penny for a day-ticket, any one can consult works on art, however costly, and this privilege must be of immense importance to the art-workman. The attendance, however, is not large, and perhaps it is lucky it is not so, for the reading-room is far too small, and the light very imperfect. There is also another reading-room where the various journals relating to art may be perused. One admirable feature of the South Kensington Museum is, that it is never closed to the public—an example which we could wish were followed by the British Museum.

What has been the actual value, educationally, of the vast expenditure on the establishments we have mentioned, is a question difficult to answer with perfect satisfaction. That much good has been done, is beyond doubt. Artistic design has been undeniably improved. Our ornaments and manufactures are more tasteful. British workmen are more able to compete with foreigners than was the case a generation or two ago. Looking not only to Kensington Museum but to the numerous schools of design planted throughout the country, one has great reason to be pleased with the progress in matters of taste which has been effected with a liberal hand within a brief period of time.

A COUNTRY CORNER.

I HAVE just left press of anxious work in London, and come down some hundred miles to a quiet, out-of-the-way house in East Anglia, an old house, where I keep up a pretence of farming some fifty acres. No; not a pretence; only I don't make it pay so much as it ought. The fact is, I can get down here only at longish intervals, and then only for a few days. Thus I always find an accumulation of things to be done; and by the time that I get abreast of my country-work, I have to be off again to that which has to be discharged in town. Moreover, not being constantly on the spot, there are little ravellings, loosenings of threads, which one can hardly expect others than the master to perceive, or take an immediate interest in rectifying. This is a digression, or prospective remark. I only want to chew the cud of the first twenty-four hours' impressions after leaving the smoking city, and opening my waistcoat to these silent country impressions. First, let me say that I brought Selim Ben Guy down from London with me. He is a purely bred and most hopefully promising Scotch deer-hound puppy. My dear friend R. gave him to me last week. I knew his excellent grandfather well, and I also have the pleasure of knowing his somewhat phlegmatic father. But Selim is as yet so full of youth's promise, that it is difficult to predicate his final adult temperament. He whined a little when he reached my house in town on the evening of Thursday; but on Friday morning, when we took him in the train down to East Anglia, he picked up his spirits. In the carriage, he made himself so agreeable as to eat biscuits from fellow-passengers, and altogether enjoyed himself. Directly we reached our country home, we turned him loose. At once he accepted 'Jem,' my fat big black curly retriever, as a perpetual butt and playmate. I was rather dubious about 'Rock,' the sharpest collie I ever knew,

foe of butchers and beggars, and who is so full of growl and long sharp teeth that when I pat him he grumbles. Rock lives in a state, at his peaceablest periods, of armed neutrality. Thinks I, I fear he may have a snap at Selim Ben Guy. But Selim, who is only a few weeks old, immediately sniffed at him, slapped his nose with his paws, made a gesture of pity at Rock's being chained up, and appointed himself at once a sort of court-fool to the testy dominant collie. He runs within the precincts of his court, and gambols about with such utter absence of suspicion, that Rock will let him pull his tail, stamp on his nose while he sleeps, and take incredible liberties.

Well, when I had introduced Selim to the dogs, I found that he had a ready paw and grin for the human household. He made friends at once with all, and as, if you wish to be loved, you must love, he found all to be his admirers. He grows hourly, and the only questionable phase he exhibits is a passion for chewing at everything, especially croquet-balls. Selim being introduced, I went to see the haystacks. Capital! The year before last, and last year, I got very small crops. In some places where the grass was mown, you could hardly tell where the scythe had passed. So, eighteen months ago, the three hayfields being hide-bound with sour moss, I had them diligently torn up with iron harrows, across and across; then I sowed some of Carter's Renovating Mixture, bush-harrowed the fields, and rolled them. Of course, last spring this produced but small result. But early this year I touched up the fields, as usual, with such manure as I had, carted some fresh earth on some places, and gave one field a small dose of nitrate of soda. How the new grass, that was sown eighteen months ago, began to grow! We got an excellent 'bottom'; the moss faded away; and we stacked, in excellent order, some eighteen tons of hay from our scanty twelve acres. I know that this is nothing wonderful, except comparatively. Then I went to see the beasts. I bought half a score of Irish steers while in town, and had not seen them. Beautiful! They will pay well. Last year, I had a dozen, and though our neighbours all round had foot-and-mouth disease, we wholly escaped. A much-used road skirts the pasture in which the beasts are generally kept, and is the channel for the passage of many animals to and from the neighbouring market-town. Now, you know that cattle, seeing others passing by, have a trick of kissing over the hedge. So I said to my man: 'If you keep those beasts untouched by the plague, I will give you five per cent. of all that I make by them.' Every day that other cattle were at all likely to pass along our skirting-road, he drove mine into the home paddock. Thus we were not touched; and I made between sixty and seventy per cent. in five months on my Irish steers. Mine is a capital place for them; plenty of grass, water, and shade. I bought them in June, and sold them at the end of October.

Along with the Irishmen were Huz and Buz, two calves I am growing into beasts, along with Daisy and Snowdrop. Huz and Buz, born this year, are much smaller than the others, and though they feed along with them, generally graze side by side. Snowdrop is a lovely white Short-horn heifer, from whom I propose to breed. Daisy I bought last autumn; a sweet little Alderney calf, like a fawn, pure bred, with large swimming eyes, and a head

which looks as if it were cut in cameo. I went to see her; she smelt my hand with her sweet cold nose, and shewed me that she was the princess of the whole party of beasts. She leads them about, and looks royal.

Then I went to inspect Old Horny, Young Horny, and Buttercup. Old Horny is a capital East Anglian cow, old, but very productive of milk. Huz is her son. Young Horny is the mother of Buz, and the cunningest cow alive. She is the ringleader in all breakings of pasturage, and so clever with her horns, that I believe she might be taught to knit. We have separated her from the others, lest she should poison their minds. She is red, and a beauty.

Then I went to see Peggy's grave. Poor dear Peggy was a pony. She died thirty-four years ago, two Sundays ago, at about half-past eleven. She simply lay down and died. The day before, she was quite well. Many a time I have driven her over to our neighbouring town, between four and five miles off, in twenty minutes, without touching her with the whip. She won trotting-matches in her youth; and my father, who had a wonderful eye for horses, bought her, promiscuously, out of a common cart in London, having seen how she was stepping out. Now she is dead; and I pray the Royal Commission on Horses to tell me where I can find such another. She is buried on the common—a field so called from the date of the Inclosure Act—and is buried where she lay down and died. I wish I had been here to have saved one of her hoofs for a snuff-box. She dies lamented, having done her duty well through a long life. Ned, I expect, will never die. Donkeys never do, they say. Ned is really a she, but has somehow come to be called Ned. She hunts me to sniff my pockets for a bit of bread; but though docile, is hard to ride. I tried her the first evening of my arrival from town. I had given her slices of our loaf, and she stood with her soft nose under my elbow. My wife was close by, and I said: 'I'll see now if I can ride her even a few yards.' So I threw my leg over her, and in less than a minute was flat on my spine in the carriage-road. Up went her back, like a dish-cover, down went her head between her fore-legs, and I was floored. Talking of falling! I had another spill that evening. In that hot July afternoon I hung my South American grass hammock in the shade between two beech-trees on the border of the lawn. I had not the proper rope to sling it, but what I had I thought would do. So, after dinner, I lay in my hammock, perfectly still, gazing up into ten thousand million leaves, when all at once the temporary rope broke, and I fell whop on my back, like Newton's apple. The laws of gravitation! If Newton had only so fallen himself, he would have unravelled the still hidden secrets of the cosmos.

After my fall, we clipped faded roses off the bushes. How soon the summer begins to go! This was the twenty-sixth of July, and the rose-trees were all dim with faded colours. How the horse-chestnuts, too, had begun to swell! We thought it sheer summer in London, but here is autumn already making its plain marks.

We could hardly sleep that night for the silence. The diamond casemated window of our bedroom looks on the garden, the paddock, and the mere. At about four, my wife called me from sweet sleep.

She had looked out of window, and seen Young Horny, the cunning cow, among the potatoes and melons. And the cow had let in not only herself, but 'Ugly' my big horse, Ned the donkey, and Old Horny. It was a lovely morning. The fowls were slowly promenading all over the paddock, picking up stray early victuals; but the animals were on forbidden ground. So I hastened on my clothes—how still a country-house is when you go down, in broad early daylight, to unbolt the doors!—and disposed of Young Horny and her followers.

Then I thought I would fish. The mere is full of perch. I got my rod—some time since disused—and pushed off in the *Devastation*—that is, my punt. Having tied her to a bunch of weeds, I let down my line. Didn't the float waltz, and bob, and dive! I caught perch enough for half-a-dozen meals; and they were excellent. But how still the surroundings were! I heard a goods-train—we are a mile from the line—arrive as if from a hundred miles off, and whistle as it passed our station as if it had hardly cleared my boat. A touch of the noisy outer world, which contrasted fitly with the calm, yet still busy life around me. My geese now. How curious geese are! I have about forty. Twenty of them are home-bred, and the other score I bought as goslings. The two parties ostentatiously keep one another at a distance, but each now and then seemed struck with some common hidden impulse, and began to cackle vehemently, and then with lumbering wings take sudden flight for the mere, descending into the water with open palm, and after a noisy bath, returning to that prolonged breakfast of theirs on the grass, which knows no pause before luncheon, and then continues the latter meal into dinner and supper.

Every now and then, when the geese were still, the silence was broken by fierce cries of love or war among the coots, of which there are plenty, jerking about among the rushes. Then there came by a peewit or lapwing, pursued by a score of swallows, which mobbed this innocent bird as if it were a hawk. So harmless people are sometimes suddenly unpopular. The swallows seemed presently to have all found out their mistake, and by one consent, set themselves to their proper work of catching flies. Would that human beings, when they find themselves in error, were as quick and unanimous in forsaking it!

Meanwhile, the fish were biting merrily. I thought of a story of a little perch. A man was fishing; his float bobbed; he struck, and the result was a little greedy perch which had nearly swallowed the hook. In extricating it, he pulled out the captive's eye, which adhered to the barb. He ought to have killed it, but carelessly flung it back into the pond. Meanwhile, as he searched in his bag for another worm, he dropped his line into the water. The float bobbed vigorously. On pulling it up, he found that he had caught just such another greedy little perch: but this had only a left eye. In fact, seeing his own other one in the water, he had without question swallowed it at once.

In my own case this morning, one unlucky fish swallowed the hook deep down into his inside. I killed it, and drew the hook out, with attached internals. Dropping this for a moment over my boat's side, it was taken as a bait by a cannibal perch; and having caught one thus, I suppose I caught half a dozen.

Among the movements around the mere was one

of the Irish beasts, which twice, apropos to nothing at all, deliberately walked round the water, mostly in file, as if they were making some mysterious circuit connected with early animal worship or rites of some kind. The wood-pigeons, too, were at their offices: one began in a fir plantation, at a corner of the mere, with the well-known refrain, generally translated, 'Take two cows, Taffy'—laying a great stress on two, as if there were some spell of immunity in the suggestion. How far their notes travel! Hundreds of yards away, I presently heard another second the proposal of the first in precisely the same words! The rooks, too, had a tremendous palaver with some three or four jackdaws: the rooks were fifty to one, but I think the jackdaws got the last word. Only talk long enough, and say something different to that uttered by other people, who are much like you in circumstance and person, and it is astonishing how the discrepancy tells, and you force attention. I really was not listening to the rooks till the jackdaws entered into the debate; and, as I have said, they got the last word.

Having strung my tale of fishes on a tough rush, I came in to breakfast. How long the day is when you rise at four! Here had I been not yet twenty-four hours in the country, and I seemed to have been living there for a week. And so fresh are the first impressions, that I have now, in a silent room, looking on the lawn, where the wagtail takes its jerky zigzag runs, and the thrush hops with long elastic bounds, sat down this afternoon to chew the cud of them in this little paper, which I hope you have read as a contribution from the first twenty-four hours of a sudden change from the gritty roar and heat of London to the shadows and the sunshine of this quiet nook.

MOSQUITOES IN PERFECTION.

ANY one whose experience of mosquitoes is limited to what is seen, felt, and heard in a summer trip to the south of France or to Italy—for example, Venice, which may be called the metropolis of European mosquitoes—has but an imperfect idea of the great mosquito world in some quarters of America. In the tropical parts, down south, especially in marshy districts adjoining the great rivers, mosquitoes abound to an extent hardly conceivable. So numerous are these insects in some localities of South America, that the wretched inhabitants sleep with their bodies covered over with sand three or four inches deep, the head only being left out, which they cover with a cloth; and travellers have been obliged to have recourse to the same expedient. Even thick clothes afford at best a very partial protection, being readily penetrated with the sharp proboscis of the insect. In the extreme northern parts of America during the heat of summer, things are not much better, and must continue so until the country along the margins of the lakes and rivers is properly cleared.

A few years ago, an English officer, Captain W. F. Butler, having been despatched in connection with an expedition to quell disturbances at Red River settlements, had an opportunity of seeing mosquitoes in perfection. The account he gives of the affair in his interesting work, *The Great*

Lone Land, recently issued, exceeds anything previously reported concerning the frightful mosquito pest in the northern parts of the American continent. Now that an extensive and fertile province, under the name Manitoba, is being laid out in this quarter for the settlement of immigrants, the description he gives cannot be made too widely known. We abbreviate it as follows.

'Shortly,' says he, 'after leaving Abercrombie, we passed a small creek, in whose leaves and stagnant waters mosquitoes were numerous. "If the mosquitoes let us travel," said my companion, as we emerged from the prairie again, "we should reach Georgetown for breakfast." "If the mosquitoes let us travel?" thought I; "surely, he must be joking."

'I little knew then the significance of the captain's words. I thought that my experiences of mosquitoes in Indian jungles and Irrawaddy swamps, to say nothing of my recent wanderings by Mississippi forests, had taught me something about these pests; but I was doomed to learn a lesson that night and the following, which will cause me never to doubt the possibility of anything, no matter how formidable or how unlikely it may appear, connected with mosquitoes. It was about ten o'clock at night, when there rose close to the south-west a small dark cloud, scarcely visible above the horizon. The wind, which was very light, was blowing from the north-east; so, when my attention had been called to the speck of cloud by my companion, I naturally concluded that it could in no way concern us; but in this I was grievously mistaken. In a very short space of time, the little cloud grew bigger, the wind died away altogether, and the stars began to look mistily from a sky no longer blue. Every now and again, my companion looked towards this increasing cloud, and each time his opinion seemed to be less favourable. But another change also occurred, of a character altogether different. There came upon us, brought apparently by the cloud, dense swarms of mosquitoes, humming and buzzing along with us as we journeyed on, and covering our faces and heads with their sharp stinging bites. They seemed to come with us, after us, and against us, from above and from below, in volumes that ever increased. It soon began to dawn upon me, that this might mean something akin to the "mosquitoes allowing us to travel" of which my friend had spoken some three hours earlier. Meantime, the cloud had increased to large proportions; it was no longer in the south-west; it occupied the whole west, and was moving on towards the north. Presently, from out of the dark heavens, streamed liquid fire, and long peals of thunder rolled far away over the gloomy prairies. So sudden appeared the change, that one could scarce realise that only a little time before the stars had been shining so brightly upon the ocean of grass. At length the bright flashes came nearer and nearer, the thunder rolled louder and louder, and the mosquitoes seemed to have made up their

minds that to achieve the maximum of torture in the minimum of time was the sole end and aim of their existence. The captain's pony shewed many signs of agony; my dog howled with pain, and rolled himself amongst the baggage in useless writhings.' To escape as far as possible from the torment, the party unyoked the horse, and lay down.

'It was now midnight. To loose the horse from the shafts, to put the oil-cloth over the cart, and to creep underneath the wheels, did not take my friend long. I followed his movements, crept in, and drew a blanket over my head. Then came the crash: the fire seemed to pour out of the clouds. It was impossible to keep the blanket on; so, raising it every now and again, I looked out from between the spokes of the wheel. During three hours, the lightning seemed to run like a river of flame out of the clouds. Sometimes a stream would descend, then, dividing into two branches, would pour down on the prairie two distinct channels of fire. The thunder rang sharply, as though the metallic clash of steel was about it, and the rain descended in torrents upon the level prairies. At about three o'clock in the morning, the storm seemed to lull a little. My companion crept out from underneath the cart; I followed. The pony, who had managed to improve the occasion by stuffing himself with grass, was soon in the shafts again; and just as dawn began to streak the dense low-lying clouds towards the east, we were once more in motion. Still, for a couple of hours more the rain came down in drenching torrents, and the lightning flashed with angry fury over the long corn-like grass, beaten flat by the rain-torrent. What a dreary prospect lay stretched around us, when the light grew strong enough to shew it! rain and cloud lying low upon the dank prairie.'

LADY LIVINGSTON'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER IX.—THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.

'My lady is at home to you, sir, of course,' said the porter at the gate-lodge, in reply to Mr Good-eve's mechanically muttered inquiry; and, indeed, the solicitor was a not infrequent visitor at the Fountains, and stood high in the esteem of the household. Lady Livingston's landed property was certainly not large, when compared with those colossal congeries of acres which go along with many a coronet, but the rent-roll was of a comfortable amount, and the holdings, as usual in the midland counties, numerous in proportion to the size of the estate. There was, therefore, what with repairs, renewals of leases, fines, recoveries, covenants, and local custom, a good deal of business to transact, and the dowager chose that her lawyers should treat with her tenantry on all points on which a dispute might conceivably arise. She was a shrewd old lady in her way, and much as she liked money and power, she had an abhorrence of litigation.

'The best way to avoid going to law, my dear,' she would say to her kinswoman, Beatrice Fleming, 'is to choose a good lawyer, and let him fight your battles for you. You may laugh, but it's true. Goodeve and Glegg, and men of that stamp, hate and detest an action in the Common Pleas, or

whatever they call it, as much as a cat dislikes wet feet, and somehow they generally manage to settle things in a friendly way. Before I hit upon this idea, I had an agent down at Heavitree who drew a salary of four hundred a year for setting me by the ears with half the farmers, and allowing the others to play the mischief with the land, and do just as they pleased. Goodeve's yearly bill never comes to half what he saves for me—I say Good-eve, because I don't think Glegg troubles himself very much about me.'

And it was the fact that Lady Livingston was one of those clients whose affairs the senior partner in the Bedford Row firm preferred to keep in his own hands, and on which he seldom or never consulted his yoke-fellow.

Mr Goodeve was not alone. He was accompanied by a clerk, a dark young man, who walked silently after his employer as the latter entered the grounds, and who was indeed no other than that Mr Daniel Davis to whose residence and domestic life we have been lately introduced. Very stooping, very awkwardly, did the solicitor, who was, it has been mentioned, tall, thin, and elderly, traverse the firm glistening gravel, on which his subordinate moved with so light and free a tread. Mr Goodeve, never robust at any time, had lately shewn signs of failing health. His powers of attending continuously to business were not what they had been a year ago. They were not what they had been even six months ago. The penmen in Bedford Row had begun to find this out. It was no secret from his junior partner. Mr Glegg had said in confidence to the wife of his bosom that old Goodeve was no longer, as a working lawyer, worth his salt, and had bemoaned the perverse pertinacity which prevented him from retiring, or, at anyrate, from agreeing to some more reasonable rule as to the division of profits. And Glegg had protested that he had himself to toil like a horse, and yet to defer in all things to the opinion of a colleague whose judgment grew constantly less reliable, but who remembered his position as the moneyed head of the house.

There was something almost plaintive in the frequent efforts which Mr Goodeve made, as he approached the mansion, to assume a jaunty air, and to shake off the outward signs of debility. There was no reason why the lawyer and his clerk should have made their way on foot across a portion of the grounds. The gates could have been opened, and the carriage could have driven up to the white stone pillars of the portico. But Mr Goodeve had preferred to alight. The country air, he declared aloud, 'freshened him up.' He looked around him as he walked, and uttered laudatory comments upon the weather, which had again become dry, and was crisp, keen, and frosty, so that the roads were hard, and there was a silvery rime of hoar-frost every morning on the grass of lawn and meadow.

The shrubbery at the Fountains was, for a suburban shrubbery, large, and sundry paths wound tortuously betwixt the masses of evergreens. There had been some intention, on the part of the landscape-gardener who laid out the pleasure-grounds, or of the nabob his patron, to form a leafy labyrinth in imitation of the neighbouring Maze at Hampton Court; but the design had been abandoned, and its sole result was, that the miniature jungle was intersected by an unusual number of narrow and

moss-grown tracks. The spot was a favourite one with Violet Maybrook, who would sometimes pace for an hour beneath the shadow of the black fir-trees and towering cedars that rose high above the glistening leaves of the holly, the bay, and the laurel, communing with her own ever-busy thoughts. There were two parts of the pleasure which she sought, as by instinct—the gloomy and neglected shrubbery, where the weeds grew rankly, without fear of the gardener's hoe; and the breezy terrace that commanded a prospect of the bright river speeding onwards to the sea. The latter view was replete with life and motion; the former was melancholy enough to have been that of some islet in the Dismal Swamp where runaway negroes hid their outlawed heads; but it suited well with Violet's mood. She was in the shrubbery when the clang of the gate-bell heralded Mr Goodeve's approach, and, herself unseen, she gazed forth between the spear-pointed leaves and scarlet berries of the hollies, and saw the lawyer and his clerk walk from the lodge towards the house. Why does she start and turn pale as she sees two such commonplace persons pacing side by side up the smooth, firm carriage-road? Mr Goodeve, with his thin grayish hair, his uncertain step, and feeble gait, was scarcely capable of inspiring alarm or agitation in any beholder who had not the ill-luck to owe him money. As for dark Mr Daniel Davis, he was surely a highly respectable young clerk, in professional attendance on his employer. Yet Violet, herself unseen, watched his every movement with anxiety, and her eyes dilated as she looked out from her leafy ambush, and her breathing all but ceased, so that she resembled a marble effigy of Terror more than a sentient being, so white and motionless was she.

'No, no!' she murmured, as the two figures disappeared behind the pillars of the portico; 'I was not mistaken. It was he; somewhat graver and paler than I remember him, but with a lurking devil behind his eyes still. He is here for no good; I am sure of that.'

These expressions could hardly have been applicable to Samuel Goodeve, gentleman, attorney-at-law.

By what invisible telegraph do those mysterious gnomes and brownies who make our beds, cook our dinners, and execute our behests, those familiar strangers of the basement who dwell beneath our roofs for half a lifetime without our gaining more than a skin-deep knowledge of their real dispositions, learn what goes on among their worldly superiors in the drawing-room? That they do so, is beyond dispute. Sarah Jane, beyond a patent weakness for ribbons, and a suspected hankering after followers, is a sealed book to Lady Fanny, whose hair she brushes, and at whose toilet she ministers. But be sure that Sarah Jane knows a great deal more of Lady Fanny than that titled Girl of the Period would consider possible, and has a very decided opinion as to her character and conduct. It might be wholesome for young Sir Harry, curled darling of Fortune though he be, to hear what 'That fellow, my man,' stolid, mute, lynx-eyed, respectful, has to say of his master behind his back. The Vehmgericht of servitude sits in judgment on us all, and before that pitiless tribunal, crowns and coronets, robes of state and gorgeous uniforms, nay, even the decorum of deans and of bankers, are of no more account than

they will prove hereafter in the grim presence of Death.

It is to the dowager's credit that Lady Livingston's servants, as a rule, approved of Lady Livingston. They were by no means blind to her failings, but they were good enough to be lenient to human imperfections, and to admit that, as mistresses went, where there was one better, there were a dozen worse. The testamentary disposal of her property was a matter of immense interest to them, not from selfish motives, but from an odd feeling of semi-feudal loyalty which still lingers in some households. They had themselves no expectation of deriving any extraordinary benefits from her ladyship's posthumous liberality. 'My lady's own maid,' a tried abigail of sixty summers, and the old coachman, who was growing too frail for a start in alien service, would probably receive small pensions. The rest had no anticipation of much beyond what was curiously summed up by the silent-shod butler as 'the correct thing—a year's wages, a suit of mourning, and ten pounds apiece.' So that this was not one of those ghoul-like establishments in which the kitchen looks out for the profitable decease of the eccentric master or mistress up-stairs.

But the dowager's servants were quite excited at the notion that a new will was being executed up-stairs, where the lawyer, Mr Goodeve, and his clerk, were now in conference with Lady Livingston. The testatrix herself was not one of those weak-minded persons who babble about their intentions to all unconcerned, or who choose confidants from sheer inability to keep a secret. Yet the domestics were as perfectly aware that a will was being read over, signed, sealed, and delivered, and that this instrument was the third or fourth of its species that had been successively prepared, as if the information had been conveyed to them through the medium of large type and hot-pressed paper.

'It's all right for Miss Beatrice: a pretty penny she'll come into'; such was the housekeeper's prediction; and the other below-stairs oracles were unanimous on that point. Who, indeed, should inherit Heavitree and the funded savings, so fitly as Lady Livingston's especial favourite, Beatrice Fleming, respecting whose future wealth the dowager had dropped hints in the hearing of more than one of her old servants.

'A little of it would be a blessing to Sir Frederick, wouldn't it?' said the white-haired coachman, who was indulgent towards the impoverished baronet, by reason of his having always been known as a dashing whip and bold rider, and, in fact, in most ways a patron of the equine genus.

'He won't get anything, not a sixpence of it,' said the butler, with a weighty conviction in his tone; and there was a general chorus of assent, mingled with some expressions of regretful sympathy, on the part of the housemaids.

'Poor young man,' they said; 'it's a pity for him too, isn't it?—not but what Miss Beatrice will make the best use of it when she gets it. It is always sad to see a gentleman so broken down, let alone his good looks, poor fellow!'

'Not when the breaking-down is his own fault, every bit of it,' severely rejoined a male moralist in livery; 'and as for his looks, I believe your women would forgive a burglar or a pickpocket, if he had but the luck to be handsome like the

captain, and—— May I never, but here he is; talk of the'—— And here the proverb was cut short by the sharp peal of the door-bell, as Sir Frederick Dashwood, who had passed through the outer gate unchallenged, sauntered up to the white stone portico, thus coming within his self-appointed censor's range of vision.

'My lady engaged with the lawyer, eh? Oh, never mind; I'll stroll about and amuse myself as well as I can, till by and by. No hurry!' was Dashwood's comment on the servant's announcement; and accordingly he lit a cigar, and rambled for a while through the grounds. There was something selfish, something expressive of indolent, insolent egotism in his very walk and air, as he lounged hither and thither, cutting with his short cane at the few hardy flowers that were yet in bloom, and kicking up the pebbles that here and there speckled the smooth gravel of the path. The fountains were yet at play, sending up their showers of shining drops, that sparkled like very diamonds in the sloping sunbeams, and uttering their rippling music in harmony with the brisk song of the twittering birds. Sir Frederick sneered as he tossed the stump of his cigar into the basin where the water-lilies, now no longer gay with their white blossoms, floated peacefully among the foam-bells.

'Doosed old trumpery,' he muttered between his teeth. 'I'd make a clearance of all these classical parties; ay, and of the yew-hedges and terrace, and of the old barrack itself, if I were master here. Sell the whole place, stock, lock, and barrel, to be cut up into Alma Rows and Laburnum Lodges; by Jove, I would!' Having said which, he kindled a fresh cigar, and sauntered off to smoke it at the stables, where the grooms and coachman greeted him with deferential cordiality, as a 'horsy' man who had ridden in the front rank with fashionable packs of foxhounds, and had 'stood to win' large sums in the very race that had ruined him long ago. He really did know something, and care something, about horse-flesh, even in the humdrum shape of the dowager's fat grays and bays; and he seemed to become at once a kinder and a wiser man, when his talk was of fetlocks and pasterns, and shoeing and paring, and singeing and clipping, and all that refers to that noble slave that man treats but sorrowily, yet from whose allegiance he derives such profit and such pride.

'Sir Frederick do know the points of a horse, for a young one, now, he do.' Such was the old coachman's verdict, when the baronet had strolled off. 'He'd have made a living, if he'd been in that line of life, as a dealer, or a farrier, or steeple-chasing, he would.'

'Ay, and an honest living,' chimed in the chief stableman cordially, and quite unconscious of the sarcasm on Dashwood's present means of subsistence which his words conveyed.

Lady Livingston was unusually gracious to her graceless kinsman when she had completed her business with the lawyer. She was, indeed, in a peculiarly affable mood, and all around her appeared to come in for a share of her expansive benevolence. She had pressed Mr Goodeve to stay and dine, an invitation which she privately regarded as a greater compliment than did the eminent family solicitor, who was well used to take his seat beside the social mahogany of still more exalted persons than a dowager baroness. But she was of the old school; he, elderly though he was,

of the new, and had sat habitually at the boards of very great people, like the Marquis of Windermere, Lord Harrogate, and the Duke of Snowdon, conscious that his serviceable aid in getting the family coach round awkward corners and out of quagmires of the law, was good and valuable consideration for their hospitality. She had been almost angry with his clerk, Mr Davis, because he declined the glass of sherry which the butler brought to him after he had played his part as a witness. But she had consoled herself by the reflection, that the clerk—a decent-looking young man, probably from Wales—was doubtless shy and nervous in the presence of one of her own lofty rank, and had smiled as she acknowledged his parting salute. She was now very genial in her reception of Sir Frederick.

'I have come—like a prodigal as I am—to invite myself to dinner, if I may,' the young man had said, looking very handsome and good-humoured as he spoke.

'I am very glad to hear it. I meant to have scolded you for neglecting me so long, but I will put that off. You will give me plenty of occasions for that, never fear,' returned the old lady, with unusual warmth of manner. She actually thanked him, later on, for coming to see her so soon after his return, bade him welcome to the Fountains, and quoted the proverbial saying, that blood is thicker than water; whereat Dashwood, who could remember many a metaphorical rap over the knuckles received from his imperious old relative, hardly believed his ears.

'I declare,' he said afterwards, 'I feel certain that, if I had asked her that evening, the old woman would have given me a cheque for five hundred, without boggling about lawyers and security. Five hundred; yes, or six, perhaps. And I, like a fool, was afraid to back my luck!'

Dinner, on that day at the Fountains, was more lively than was often the case, and was served on a scale of unwonted splendour. Some rare old wine—rarer even than that which had been uncorked for Oswald Charlton—was brought forth from the cobwebbed crypt of its concealment, to tickle the palate of the guest. 'That's amazing Burgundy!' observed Dashwood, as his glass was refilled with the liquid ruby; 'I've a faint recollection of its flavour as a boy. But it's better now.'

'Yes, it's better now,' said the dowager; 'at least if age makes perfect. My lord had it as a present from Nesselrode or Pozzo di Borgo, I forget which, in the year '14, when he was at Paris. There is not much of it left.'

Violet Maybrook's part must on that day have been a difficult one to play. She had met Dashwood in the presence of Lady Livingston and of Miss Fleming; and nothing could have been less calculated to attract remark than the manner in which she did meet him.

'I am glad to see you again,' she had said, simply, and her whole demeanour was that of one who is pleased to encounter an old acquaintance, though rather for the sake of the association with other scenes and times, than on account of any personal preference. But it was trying to her haughty spirit to have to spend hours in the company of the man whom she loved in spite of herself, and of the contempt which she could not but feel for his nature. And this ordeal was the

more irksome, because Sir Frederick chose to pay marked attention to his cousin Beatrice, and to exert for her benefit all his powers of pleasing. That he succeeded in pleasing Miss Fleming, was more than Violet could perceive; but there was no doubt of his having at all events achieved the minor triumph of riveting her notice, and of bringing to her lips, once and again, the smiles which had of late been rarely seen there. It was a remarkable circumstance that Lady Livingston's indulgence towards her scapegrace relative extended on this occasion so far that she seemed to regard with positive approval the efforts of the ruined baronet to ingratiate himself with the heiress, and more than once backed Dashwood's entreaty that his cousin would sing some song, 'an old favourite,' to use his own words, when Beatrice manifested some reluctance to comply with his request.

'I thought the dowager hated the man;' it was thus that Violet communed with herself; 'but I suppose old women can be whimsical, as well as young ones. To judge by her present conduct, a bystander might suppose Sir Frederick to be a suitor of the most eligible sort, whose proposals it was desirable to meet half-way, and that my noble employer was ready at a moment's warning to utter the traditional "Bless you, my children," by way of benison on this interesting pair.'

Keen-sighted as Violet was, her powers of perception were somewhat obscured by the tempest of jealous wrath that raged within her heart, and to conceal which, she had need of all her self-control. A very astute and impartial observer might have noticed that the autocratic mistress of the Fountains, with all her benignity of look and manner, eyed her insolvent kinsman with somewhat of the expression which a cat wears when watching the movements of a half-killed mouse. With what amused intentness Puss observes the panting creature as it stirs afresh; how blandly, yet with what pitiless vigilance in her green eyes, does she note its struggles to escape; nay, how softly, as in sign of encouragement, does she pat with her velvet paw, purring the while, the trembling victim, that in a minute more will be crunched, body and bones, by the cruel gripe of her sharp teeth. To all outward appearance, Lady Livingston was fully reconciled to the impenitent prodigal whom she had known and distrusted so long; but there was a half-humorous twinkle in the dowager's eye which was lost on the other members of the company, and which seemed to be suggested by some secret sense of enjoyment.

Once, as she stood beside the piano, turning over the leaves of a music-book, Dashwood contrived, unheard, to exchange a word or two with Violet Maybrook.

'You are not angry with me, Violet?' he said in a low voice; 'we ought not to quarrel, ought we?' And he took her hand in his; but she snatched it from him, not petulantly, but with the steady resolve of an indignation too deep for words.

'Carry your attentions elsewhere,' she said bitterly; 'they may be valued there by one who has not learned to read you as I, to my sorrow, have done. You have begun well, and had better go on as you have begun. Go, Sir Frederick, to Miss Fleming's side, before we are observed.'

'On my life, on my soul, Violet,' the baronet returned earnestly, 'you have no cause for anger, none. I have been acting a part, nothing more.

You don't suppose I care a straw for the pretty baby-face yonder! But the way to loosen the old woman's purse-strings is to be civil to my cousin Beatrice, whom she thinks perfection, and so'—

Violet interrupted him fiercely. 'And so you would have no objection to a rich bride, whose dower would free you from your debts; and the old lady is capricious, and Beatrice gentle and weak-willed; and all would go smoothly on, were it not for her whom you now insult by paying court to another before her eyes. Beware, Sir Frederick Dashwood, how you make an enemy of me!'

And the next moment she was seated at the piano, singing, in the richest tones of her sweet clear voice, one of those Canadian-French boat-songs which Dashwood had heard, many a time, among people and scenes now far away. Her passionate anger merely served to add a charm and a pathos to her accents as they rang through the room, and she looked royally beautiful as she rose to receive, with becoming meekness, the praise of her scanty audience.

'After that,' said Beatrice, laughing, 'I shall sing no more. My poor little ditties would be ashamed to make themselves audible after Miss Maybrook's performance.'

It was late when Dashwood left the house to return to London, and, as he passed down the carriage-drive, in the clear air of a frosty night, with the starlit sky above his head, he lingered for a moment or two, and looked up at the mansion that he had just quitted.

'I wonder,' he said softly, 'which of those lighted windows is that of *her* room? Pshaw! What on earth does it matter! A pretty fellow am I, indeed, to be spooning about here like a love-sick Romeo; and yet, by Jove! I felt to-night as if I could have been fool enough to marry that girl outright, if she would have me. Queer, that I should prize her more, now that she is scornful, hostile, almost, than when she took every word I said as truth and law, out yonder. But I should grow tired of her in a week, and, what is more to the purpose, I cannot afford it. So, I must chuck sentiment over, and stick to business.'

Still, as Frederick Dashwood, baronet of the United Kingdom, and still (thanks to the dilatory proceedings of Cutts and Spatterdash, the well-known army agents, whose incoming client boggled at the heavy over-regulation price which their outgoing customer demanded) a captain in Her Majesty's army, walked towards the railway station, he thought more of Violet Maybrook than he had done since they parted on the platform of the London terminus, after their landing from the Canadian homeward-bound packet which had brought them to Liverpool. It was with some regret, and almost a touch of compunction, that he thought of her, and of the gradual change which had been worked in her. When first they met, she had been a bright, clever, high-spirited girl; and now she was a woman, fierce, vindictive, reticent of counsel, sensitive to wrong.

'Not the sort of lady-love to be lightly cast off,' thus ran the thread of his meditations; 'and yet, in the Fiend's name, what can she do? To hurt me, she must harm herself—not that such a consideration would stop her,' he added ruefully, and this time aloud, 'if once her mind were fairly bent on vengeance. And yet, who knows! There

is a soft spot in the hearts of almost all women, when it comes to the point of settling scores with the man who has injured them. I'll risk it—must risk it. The Jews could sell me up any morning, and I am as ill off as the fellow in the fable—Damocles, wasn't he?—with the sword hanging over his head by night and day. And yet, if Violet and Beatrice were a brace of heiresses, I'd not hesitate long as to which I would choose for my partner in life. The dowager's money-bags overweight the scale.'

Thus brooding over the necessity and the precariousness of his position, he reached the station in time to be a passenger by the last toward train. And as that train rushed on through the darkness, the peaceful stars serenely shining overhead, the trees, the hedges, and the house-roofs looming through the uncertain light, even the choicest of tobacco could not soothe Sir Frederick into that condition of calm stolidity which is the privilege of a sound constitution and a callous conscience. It was one of those rare moments when the most reckless pause to look back, like a pilgrim who has gained some ridge along the mountain-road, at the worse than wasted life that lies behind them, and see, in the clear cold gray of the distant horizon, the opportunities lost for ever, the right path neglected for crooked ways, all that might have been, but which now can never be. Dashwood had schemed and striven, and he had had his will and his way. There had been a time when the baronetcy had seemed out of his reach, and when he could scarcely have hoped to inherit whatever his offended grandfather might have to leave. He was Sir Frederick now, and the very rank that he had once desired so ardently merely supplied him with an additional reason for grumbling at the fate which had decreed that he should be a titled pauper.

'A precious mess I have made of it!'—such were his last reflections. 'And as for Violet, poor girl, it would have been better for both of us if our ways in life had always been apart.'

CHAPTER X.—THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

Lady Livingston, though an imperious, was not a hard task-mistress to those beneath her domestic sway, and did not, as some employers do, regard her companion as a sentry never to be off duty, a sort of useful shadow, never to be too far separated from its proprietor. Hale and able-bodied, she did not stand in need of those small services which are so constantly exacted by opulent infirmity from youthful indigence, did not drop her handkerchief at one moment, mislay her spectacles at another, and periodically institute a quest in search of an invaluable bunch of keys (all the time reposing in the innermost recess of her own cavernous pocket), which entailed a game at hide-and-seek in every nook and corner of the house. The dowager readily agreed that Violet, who had been accustomed to much outdoor exercise and fresh air, should spend her leisure time in rambling about the grounds, or, indeed, elsewhere.

'Go into the town, if you like, my dear, and take one of the servants if you prefer it. You'll not do it twice, I suspect. The shop-lads from London will stare at you, and you won't care about the grocer's two-and-ninepenny Moning—good tea cost a guinea a pound when I was a child, in the days

of convoys and the old Honourable Company, but then it *was* tea—there is none now—or the linen-draper's ticketed goods, or the music-seller's window, full of pictures of black men making themselves ridiculous. Nobody will tease you here, at any rate, and you get the air twice as well on the terrace as in the streets.'

Violet was on the terrace now, looking dreamily up the reaches of the river, steel-blue in the pale sun-gleams that fell through the broken clouds above, for now a fresh change of weather seemed imminent. The sky was covered by long filmy threads of white vapour, some gathered into skeins, as though newly twisted by the distaff of Norse Valkyr or Greek Destiny, some woven into webs fit to be the winding-sheet of a dead Titan. Still the stream ran down, and the narrow-leaved willows waved their gaunt arms, and the water rippled among the sedges and reeds that hid the pike and harboured the white armada of swans, as stream, willow, and wave had done before the glint of the Roman helmets and the flash of the Roman spears had scared the painted indwellers of British London.

'And this is England!' she murmured, scarce conscious that her thoughts had shaped themselves into articulate sounds; 'so like, yet so unlike, the Old Country of my girlish dreams. What have I found as yet? A packhorse round of duties, a carking weight of care, the monotony of the cloister, unrelieved by the fervour of a willing sacrifice of self. Was it for this that I have done and dared so much, until the heart within my breast seems changed to very stone, and I can pray no more, weep no more, but must wait, and long with unsatisfied longing for what can never be mine! To be in England, in wonderful, wealthy England, where power and splendour were the appanage of the high-born, or of such as could win their way upwards to the eminence on which the accident of birth had seated others, such was my wish. I am here, and in what am I the better for the change? To be my lady—one of the titled few of whom I had read, even as a baronet's wife—was my ambition, and even that poor prize seems to be as far beyond my grasp as the heaven that I shall never win. I might force him to marry me. The alternative is too dreadful for a luxurious Sybarite to defy, were it once but fairly put before him, with no loophole for subterfuge or escape; but in such a wedding, Hate would stand, ghostly, behind bride and bridegroom, and'—

She paused, and stood, with dilated eyes and lips half-parted, gazing with as much of startled eagerness as if she had in very truth beheld the grim Presence of which she spoke, incarnate before her. What she saw in reality was a girl of slender form and low stature, with colourless hair and pallid face, and cold keen eyes riveted on those of Violet, a girl whose attire was faultlessly neat, and of almost Quakerlike soberness as to shape and colour, and who had approached her so softly in the midst of her reverie, that a less lively imagination than that of Miss Maybrook might easily have conceived that she had risen out of the earth, like the elf that she seemed to be. In short, the intruder was no other than the lodger whom Mrs Gulp of Great Eldon Street knew by the name of Miss Davis, and whose brother was the pattern clerk of those very eminent solicitors, Goodeve and Glegg, of Bedford Row. The elf looked smiling up in

Violet's face, and made a quick fluttering movement forward, so like to the abrupt dart of a snake, that Lady Livingston's companion instinctively shrank back, though in the next instant an unwonted tinge of crimson rose to warm the creamy whiteness of her fair face, and she drew herself up to her full height, as if in scorn.

'To think that I should frighten you!' said the elf, with sportive malice: 'you were not always so easy to alarm, Violet, love!'

'Nor am I alarmed now,' answered Violet coldly; 'nor is your coming, Miss Larpent, so absolute a surprise to me as you appear to consider it. From the moment when I saw your brother arrive here, in attendance on his employer, I felt assured that you could not be far away. Now, frankly, what would you have of me? I know you too well to suppose that you have come here without wanting something, Miss Larpent.'

'Call me Aphy,' said the elf, in the prettiest tone of playful reproach: 'why be so formal with your old playfellow and schoolmate! What have I done, Vi, that I should cease to be Aphy to you?'

'Dare you ask me!' burst out Violet, with a passionate indignation that made her voice quiver, as with flashing eyes she confronted the intruder. 'Is it nothing that you have brought disgrace upon an honest name, and on kindred whose misfortune it was to be near to you! Is it nothing that your shame embittered the last days of your gray-haired father's life, and that he learned to be thankful that your mother had not lived long enough to know her best-loved child for what she was! Is it nothing that your brother has gone forth from his native place with the brand of Cain upon his brow, made into a murderer by his stubborn fondness for a sister who merited so little sympathy! Is it nothing that you are yourself a wanderer, as guilty of yon poor wretch's violent death, as if your hand had held the weapon that sent him, with all his sins upon his head, to judgment! And now you come here'—

'And now I come here,' interrupted the elf, with glittering eyes that had changed colour repeatedly during the course of Violet's speech, and in which there now shone a baleful green light, such as glows in those of the serpent as he lifts his head to strike—'and now I come here to have this unkind version of my story flung in my teeth so rudely, and that by an old friend like you, Vi. Do be careful, for your own sake, dearest. Take my advice, Violet Maybrook, and don't forget that your own reminiscences should make you more charitable in your criticisms on your neighbours. You played the same game with Dashwood, yonder, as mine with Lovelace.'

'I deny it!' flashed out Violet, towering above her almost dwarfish adversary, like a grand statue of Scorn: 'there rests no stain on my name, or on my soul.'

'No stain, Violet, darling!' sneered Miss Larpent, with one of those serpentine movements which made her pliant frame appear unnaturally supple, and with eyes that seemed to sparkle as with an unholy fire of awakened malignity. 'It may be, in one sense, that you speak the truth, and at any rate your prudence or your luck has kept you from the breath of scandal; but yet you had best beware lest the true story of a certain bright spring day, far off in the woods of our own Canada,

should ever ooze out. The worst that can be said of me has been told, and if many would condemn, some would pity me. But as for you'—

'Hush! hush! for the love of Heaven,' said Violet hurriedly; and glancing quickly to left and right, as if in fear of eaves-droppers: 'I cannot bear this. You take a cruel advantage of me, Aphy; but—but—you are right, after all. I have no claim to judge harshly of others.' And as she thus spoke, she wrung her hands with a slight but fearfully expressive gesture, and then allowed her arms to fall passively down by her side, as she stood slightly bending forward, as one who has striven against fate, and has been vanquished.

'I thought,' said the elf triumphantly, 'that you would hear reason by and by, Violet, love! And now to business.'

'Business; ah, yes! I had forgotten that,' returned Miss Maybrook, without any change of attitude. 'You want something of me, or you would not be here.'

'Of course I want something,' composedly answered she who has hitherto been known by the strange name of Aphy: 'every one does, so far as I know. And my present want is a very old and common one—money.'

'I have very little of that,' said Violet, almost eagerly, as she drew forth her purse; 'but if that little can be of any service, you shall be welcome to the use of it.'

'Thank you; no!' answered her former friend demurely: 'your finances, Vi, are scarcely worth poaching upon. But, if you are not the rose of aristocracy, you are near enough to it to imbibe its perfume, which is wealth. You live, metaphorically, in the lap of luxury. You are the daily and hourly companion of grand folks, who would hesitate to allow their garments to brush against mine, should we meet by accident. The employer whom you serve is rich and whimsical; that much I know. The man who promised to marry you—his brother-officer promised to marry me, and you remember the result—is at least a baronet, and has some sort of bemuddled fortune. Bruce and I are poor, Vi, dear. He has his wretched pay as a clerk, and the few weekly shillings that I earn by teaching do not greatly swell the stock. In this strait, I naturally remember that I have a friend in you, Violet, a friend who cannot refuse my petition.' The last words were uttered fawningly, but with a malicious emphasis that was not thrown away upon the hearer.

'What can I do?' said Violet wearily: 'my position here scarcely entitles me to—beg. Anything beyond a small sum Lady Livingston would probably deny me. As for my salary'—

'Once again, I have no designs upon your pittance of salary,' tartly broke in the elf; 'nor, just at present, Vi, do I urge you to make a raid on the dowager's purse. What would seem to her ladyship as a magnificent donation, five pounds—or, in case of marvellous liberality, ten—to a "deserving object," would but stave off the evil hour of sheer destitution for some few days more. No; it is to Sir Frederick that I would have you apply.'

'And to what good purpose?' pleaded Violet, with averted face. 'You, who know so much, must be aware that he is crippled by debts and beset by creditors; that he is a desperate and broken man, growing daily more and more callous

and reckless; and that he treats me with neglect, now that he is at home again among his early associates. Of what avail would my request be, were I to humble myself so far as to proffer it!'

'You underrate your influence, dear Violet,' said Miss Larpent, with a mocking laugh. 'It is not to his affection that you should appeal, but to his selfish fears. You know, as well as I do, that he cannot refuse you a boon which it may be in his power to grant. And there are always pickings to be found among the rags and relics of a ruined fortune. Those only are really poor who never had a chance of being what the world calls "broken down." Sir Frederick will growl and shew his teeth, I doubt not, but he will presently recognise the truth, that discretion is the wisest policy for such as he is. Come, I will be moderate, but there must be no delays. In three days at farthest, I shall expect to receive as many hundred pounds. Silence is a marketable commodity, and worth its price.'

Violet shook her head. 'I have scanty hopes,' she answered; 'but I will try to arrange matters as you wish.'

'Do so, like a dear, dear old friend,' replied the elf, with a sprightly buoyancy of tone and manner that made her resemblance to a malevolent fairy even more striking than before. 'Nor need I recommend secrecy. For your own sake, you will be mute. So, now, I must go, before my presence attracts the attention of some member of my lady's household. I am a trespasser here, you must know; and had not the gardener fortunately left the wicket-gate unfastened, yonder, by the river-bank, I should not have reached your presence without provoking remark and inquiry. Here'—and as she spoke she thrust into Violet's hand a card on which some words were written—'is my address in London. Bring the money, or let Sir Frederick bring it, as you choose, but remember the three days—for I grant no further grace. Now, one thing more, and then I vanish like a ghost at cockcrow. Kiss me, Violet!' And the little creature opened her lithe arms and lifted her face, as waiting for the embrace of her, former friend. Slowly, and as if under the overmastering influence of some magic spell, did Violet bow down her stately head and press her lips to Miss Larpent's sallow cheek, shuddering the while, as if she had touched the slimy skin of an actual snake. Nor could the eye of the fellest reptile that ever haunted the long grass of an Indian jungle glitter with a more intense expression of exultant malignity, than did those colourless ones of Miss Larpent's, as they looked up at Violet when that enforced caress had been duly paid.

'Now, farewell; but remember!' she said, and then was gone.

But Violet stood motionless on the terrace, long after her unwelcome visitant had left her, nor could a sculptor have desired a fairer model, had he dreamed of moulding a statue of Despair. A pagan of old days might have believed her to be one who had met, face to face, with Medusa's self, and to be stiffening into stone under the potency of the Gorgon glance. At last, with a faint low sigh, she stirred, and as the light of a reawakened intelligence came back into her eyes, she drew herself up, and for a moment gazed around her with all the scornful anger of an insulted queen.

'It begins, then, in this world—the doom of the lost ones,' she murmured so faintly, that the sound of her voice reached her own ear, but as a whisper from afar off; 'and mine has not tarried long. And she—yonder viper—has defied me, humbled me, forced me to own that I hold my place in the world, such as it is, on the frail tenure of her greed and her caprice, and she has left me—uncrushed!' She raised her arms as she spoke, and let them drop again, repeating, unconsciously, the gesture by which she had expressed the utter helplessness of a proud spirit to cope with some resistless force that will not be gainsaid. Then, without a word more, she walked slowly back towards the house.

Violet's duty of reading aloud to the dowager, a task which she executed after dinner on most days, was but badly fulfilled on that which had witnessed her interview with Miss Larpent. Her voice, usually so clear and musical, was now so unsteady and indistinct, that Lady Livingston, who had that all-devouring interest in fiction which we sometimes notice in the survivors of a bygone generation, became for the first time dissatisfied with the conduct of her dependent.

'There, there, child,' she said angrily; 'put the book down, please, if you can read no better than that. It's a novel that I'm quite absorbed in, and you've tried my patience beyond bearing for the last ten minutes, so that I have completely lost the thread of the heroine's speech, and don't know what the villain is driving at. I never remember you to have been so absent as you seem to-night.'

Beatrice Fleming smiled as she offered to read the remainder of the chapter in Miss Maybrook's stead, and indeed neither of the girls thought much of the petulance of the old lady, who was accustomed to say of herself that her bark was by far more formidable than her bite, and whose chiding was commonly softened by the quaint sense of humour which rarely deserted her. But Beatrice could not but observe how pale and grave her kinswoman's companion had become, and how evident was the effort by which she kept her thoughts from wandering, as she went through her habitual routine of duty.

'I thought Miss Maybrook was ill to-day,' she said, on parting for the night with Lady Livingston; 'her hand was very cold, and her mind seemed to be preoccupied.'

'Nonsense!' returned the dowager: 'she was a little careless and dull, that's all—moped, I suppose, in this stupid house, where I can't allow you, dear, to stay much longer. But you see that I scolded her, and she brightened up wonderfully after that.'

THE INN.

THE queer, old-fashioned Inn stood on the heath,
Nine bowshots from the peak-roofed country town;
Steeds halted at its doors to gather breath,
Before the sheer rush for the Southron down.
In front, reposed the long-neglected pond—
Fisured with mosses—green with stagnant weed—
Around, were old-world flotsam, and beyond
One loop of river, crystal as a bead.

It was deep Summer, and the simmering heat
On stile, and stone, and tree, and hostler beat,
But the night gathered, and the air grew sweet:

Sweet, and of Summer music redolent;

There piped the blackbird on the bush behind
The parlour lattice, with throat sideways bent,
Whilst imaging his shadow on the blind:

A red-cheeked damsel sang unto her kine

A fireside song, in the extremest tone

Of sadness: then the distant clock struck nine,

A lusty horn, at intervals, was blown.

'From London!' went the cry, 'the Mail! the Mail!'

And in it dashed—four beasts with foam-flecks
pale,

And ribbons knotted around ear and tail.

Booted, and pistoled to the very teeth,

The scarlet guard, with ringing heels leaped down,

A glow of pleasantry half hid beneath

The purport of his grave, official frown.

Where had he learned to swear? The roads were vile,

The times atrocious; empires cried for sale;

Yet grief was tempered in the side-long smile

Which hailed the landlord and the proffered ale.

'There'—and his hand convulsively would clench—

'Whether within the dock, or on the bench,

God save old England, and confound the French.'

So passed: a smoking cloud of dust alone

Betrayed his passage, leaning to the west.

The Inn, its peace a moment overthrown,

Relapsed again into its dreamy rest.

I heard the landlord's daughter—rooms away—

Fingering the ancient harpsichord:

In tangled cadences I read the lay:

'A Devon maiden dared to love a lord:

And she proved true, but he proved false! Ah,
me!'

There was an instant shift of voice and key,

Shut instrument, and wildering hush for me.

The ancient bed, with rusted damask hung,

The stern brown pictures in the candle-light,

The coifed canary at the window swung,

O'erpowered me with a weird, fantastic fright.

Low moans came from the panels, in the dusk,

And rustling garments trailed along the floor,

The scentless vases breathed anew of musk,

And some one whispered through the oaken door.

'Twas midnight, and from stall and shed below,

The cocks, with outstretched necks, began to crow,

And, then, again the bells chimed sweet and slow.

Most ghostlike room—white bed, the couch of peace,

With lavender between the linen set—

Quaint sill, whereon, to charm them to increase,

Full in the moon, stand pots of mignonette;

To-night I am your lord; sheer cleaves the spire

Above the lightless streets; no soul's abroad;

Over the houses, meadow, croft, and byre,

Brood silence and the quietude of God;

And so till morning, hour succeeding hour,

Timed by the sleepless watcher in the tower,

Till sunrise in the east once more shall flower.

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